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ABSTRACT

Research has shown variables of parental nurturance (acceptance, encouragement, support) of their children to be positively correlated with their children's self-esteem. This study investigated the effects of parental nurturance and the use of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parental discipline upon the self-esteem of college students. College students (N=335) completed a demographic information sheet and five questionnaires designed to measure parental nurturance, parental discipline, and self-esteem. The results revealed that parental nurturance of both the mother and father were more strongly correlated with self-esteem than were the parental discipline variables. While the use of authoritarian and authoritative discipline significantly correlated with self-esteem, regression analyses revealed that their effects upon self-esteem were primarily due to their influence upon parental nurturance. The six variables that correlated significantly with self-esteem were mother's nurturance, father's nurturance, mother's authoritarianism, mother's authoritativeness, father's authoritarianism, and father's authoritativeness. The familial variables of parental nurturance and parental discipline were more strongly correlated with the self-esteem of females than with the self-esteem of males. (Author/NB)

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Parenting and Adolescent Self-Esteem

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ABSTRACT: *The effects of parental nurturance and the use of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parental discipline upon the self-esteem of college students were investigated. It was found that: a) parental nurturance of both the mother and the father were more strongly correlated with self-esteem than were the parental discipline variables, b) while the use of authoritarian and authoritative discipline significantly correlated with self-esteem, regression analyses revealed that their effects upon self-esteem were primarily due to their influence upon parental nurturance, and c) the familial variables of parental nurturance and parental discipline were more strongly correlated with the self-esteem of females than with the self-esteem of males.*

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In studies reported by Coopersmith (1967), Sears (1970), and Bachman (1982), the familial variables of parental nurturance and parental discipline have been implicated in the development of self-esteem in children. While several terms have been used to describe the variable of parental nurturance —— parental attention and concern (Coopersmith), parental warmth and affection (Sears), and closeness to parents (Bachman) —— consistently parents' acceptance, encouragement, and support of their children was found to positively correlate with their children's self-esteem.

In terms of the parental discipline variable, Sears (1970) reported that

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father dominance in the control and punishment of children is associated with lower levels of self-esteem in those children. Similarly, Bachman (1982) found that parental punitiveness is inversely related to the self-esteem of children. The results of each of these studies seem to indicate that strong disciplinary practices by parents have a deleterious effect upon the self-esteem of children. Coopersmith (1967), however, reported that the development of higher levels of self-esteem in children coincides with a parental discipline that is firm, demanding, and sets clear limits of behavior. He pointed out, however, that this discipline should also be flexible enough to allow for situational variation by the children and that drastic forms of punishment should be avoided.

Disciplinary suggestions similar to Coopersmith's have been offered by Baumrind (1971), who has proposed a distinction among three parental styles: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Based upon her distinctions, permissive parents tend to make fewer demands on their children, allowing them to regulate their own activities as much as possible. They are also less apt to employ punishment with their children than are other parents. Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, value unquestioning obedience as they attempt to control their children's behavior, often through the use of forceful punishment. Authoritative parents, however, tend to fall somewhere between these extremes. They are characterized as providing clear and firm direction for their children, but this disciplinary clarity is moderated by reason, flexibility, and verbal give-and-take. While Baumrind has not explicitly discussed the effects of these parental prototypes upon the self-esteem of children in the family, these effects have been implicitly proffered. Baumrind (1971, 1982) reported that authoritative parenting is more effective in the development of several correlates of self-esteem (e.g., self-reliance, self-control, independence) than is either

permissive parenting or authoritarian parenting. Furthermore, Baumrind has suggested that authoritarian parenting is especially deleterious in the development of these correlates of self-esteem.

In the present study, responses of college students were used to determine: a) each participant's self-esteem, b) the nurturance that each participant received from their mother and their father, and c) the degree to which each participant's mother and father employed permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting practices. It is hypothesized that self-esteem is positively related to parental nurturance and to authoritative parental discipline and negatively related to authoritarian parental discipline.

Method

Subjects

The participants were 408 students from a co-educational liberal arts college in the upper Midwest who agreed to participate in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. The responses of 55 students were not included in the present analyses either because one of their parents had died or because their parents were divorced or separated. The responses of 18 additional subjects were eliminated from the analyses because their response forms were inadequately completed. The remaining 167 females (mean age = 18.65 years) and 168 males (mean age = 19.19 years) completed several questionnaires.

Materials and Procedure

The 335 college students were asked to complete five questionnaires and one demographic information sheet. The order in which these forms were presented to the participants was randomized. Each of the research participants was told that we were investigating factors that are believed to influence self-esteem in young adults. They were instructed that there were no right or wrong answers, and

therefore they should respond to each item as honestly as possible. They were also encouraged not to spend too much time on any one item since we were interested in their first reaction to each statement. They were also reminded of the importance of responding to every item in the questionnaires.

Parental nurturance. Concepts and items related to parental nurturance derived from several sources (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Schaefer & Bell, 1958; Straus & Brown, 1978) were used to construct 76 questionnaire items. These 76 items were stated from the point of view of an individual evaluating the parental nurturance he/she received. We reasoned that the actual parental behavior to which an individual has been exposed will affect that individual only to the extent and in the way that he/she has perceived that behavior. Therefore, unlike the results of Coopersmith (1967) and Sears (1970), where parental nurturance was primarily determined by means of interviews with the mothers, the parental nurturance scores in the present study were derived from the judgments of the subjects themselves (similar to the method employed by Bachman, 1982).

The wording of the 76 questionnaire items was balanced to control for an acquiescence bias. These 76 items were then presented to 177 undergraduates who were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Item score-total score correlations were computed for each of these 76 items (Crano & Brewer, 1973). Twenty-four items yielding an item score-total score correlation greater than .70 were retained for the final questionnaire. The final version of the Parental Nurturance Scale consisted of 12 positively-stated items and 12 negatively-stated items. Examples of items in the scale are the following: "I am an important person in my mother's eyes"; "My mother often acts as if she doesn't care about me"; "My mother doesn't really know what kind of person I am"; and "My mother

is a warm and caring individual." Two forms of this questionnaire were constructed, one to measure the degree of mother's nurturance and one to measure the degree of father's nurturance. Test-retest reliabilities based upon the responses of 85 college students over a two-week interval were $r = .92$ for mother's nurturance and $r = .94$ for father's nurturance.

Parental discipline. Twenty-one professionals (10 males, 11 females) working in the fields of psychology, sociology, education, and social work were given 48 questionnaire items based upon Baumrind's (1971) descriptions of the permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parental prototypes. Each professional was also given verbatim descriptions of each of these prototypes (Baumrind, 1971, pp. 22-23), and was asked to judge each item as indicative of permissive parenting, authoritarian parenting, or authoritative parenting. Each professional was encouraged to refrain from categorizing a particular item if he/she judged that it failed to clearly delineate one of these three parental styles. If greater than 95% of the judges (at least 20 of the 21 judges) agreed that an item clearly represented one of the three parental prototypes, then it was included in a final pool of items. From this pool of 36 items, 10 permissive, 10 authoritarian, and 10 authoritative items were retained for the final Parental Authority Questionnaire. Each of these items was stated from a symbolic interactionist position such that respondents were to evaluate the extent to which permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting were employed in the home, as they perceived it. Responses to the 30 questionnaire items were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Two forms of this questionnaire were constructed, one to evaluate the parenting provided by the mother and one to evaluate the parental discipline provided by the father. Test-retest studies based upon the responses of 85

college students over a two-week period yielded the following reliabilites: r = .81 for mother's permissiveness, r = .86 for mother's authoritarianism, r = .78 for mother's authoritativeness, r = .77 for father's permissiveness, r = .85 for father's authoritarianism, and r = .92 for father's authoritativeness. These reliabilities are highly respectable given the fact that there are only 10 items per scale.

Self-esteem. Each of the participants completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965). The Total Positive Self-Esteem Score was computed for each participant. The higher the score on this scale, the higher an individual's self-esteem. The test-retest reliability of this measure reported by Fitts (1965) is r = .92.

Demographic information. The participants also provided information concerning: a) their sex, b) their age, c) whether one of their parents has died, and d) whether their parents were divorced or separated.

Results

The mean levels of self-esteem for the female and male participants were 340.26 (SD = 30.11) and 335.98 (SD = 28.68), respectively. This difference is not significant (t = 1.33, $p > .15$).

Intercorrelations for all participants combined are presented in Table 1. As hypothesized, the following six variables correlated significantly with self-esteem: mother's nurturance (r = +.509, $p < .0005$), father's nurturance (r = +.539, $p < .0005$), mother's authoritarianism (r = -.230, $p < .01$), mother's authoritativeness (r = +.335, $p < .0005$), father's authoritarianism (r = -.193, $p < .01$), and father's authoritativeness (r = +.334, $p < .0005$).

Judging from the size of these correlation coefficients considered individ-

ually, one would expect a very large proportion of the variance in self-esteem

Table 1

Intercorrelations for All Participants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-Esteem	1.000								
2. Mother's Nurturance	.309****	1.000							
3. Father's Nurturance	.539****	.472****	1.000						
4. Mother's Permissiveness	.030	.051	-.043	1.000					
5. Mother's Authoritarianism	-.230**	-.317****	-.136*	-.409****	1.000				
6. Mother's Authoritativeness	.335****	.595****	.300****	.042	-.380****	1.000			
7. Father's Permissiveness	.020	-.116	.083	.389****	-.202*	-.094	1.000		
8. Father's Authoritarianism	-.193**	-.122	-.421****	-.229**	.303****	-.184*	-.319****	1.000	
9. Father's Authoritativeness	.334****	.237***	.671****	-.059	-.116	.423****	.065	-.460****	1.000

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .005
****p < .0005

to be associated with these factors. However, mother's nurturance correlates strongly with mother's authoritarianism (r = -.317) and with mother's authoritativeness (r = +.595); similarly, father's nurturance is strongly related to father's authoritarianism (r = -.421) and father's authoritativeness (r = +.671). Therefore the total proportion of variance in self-esteem associated with parental nurturance and the parental discipline variables together may not be much greater than the proportion of variance in self-esteem associated with parental nurturance alone; in fact, subsequent multiple regression analyses revealed just that.

The six variables that were found to correlate significantly with self-esteem were entered into various regression equations. These analyses revealed that father's nurturance alone was associated with nearly 29% (R^2 adjusted for df = .288) of the variance in self-esteem, and that the addition of the mother's nurturance variable significantly affected R^2 [F (1,332) = 43.21, p < .0001].

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Together father's nurturance and mother's nurturance accounted for 37% of the variance in participants' self-esteem. However, the additions of the mother's authoritarianism, mother's authoritativeness, father's authoritarianism, and father's authoritativeness variables to the regression equations failed to augment this adjusted R^2 value of .370 obtained with the father's nurturance and mother's nurturance variables alone. Thus, as was suspected, these multiple regression analyses confirmed that the proportion of variance in self-esteem that is associated with the parental nurturance and the parental discipline variables together is not significantly greater than that associated with the parental nurturance variables alone.

In an effort to investigate the differential effects of the nurturance and discipline variables in the present study upon the self-esteem of young women and young men, further analyses were completed on the female and male data separately. The intercorrelations for the female participants are presented in Table 2. Similar to the results obtained with the total data, the young women's

Table 2

Intercorrelations for Female Participants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-Esteem	1.000								
2. Mother's Nurturance	.587****	1.000							
3. Father's Nurturance	.360****	.448****	1.000						
4. Mother's Permissiveness	.085	.072	.035	1.000					
5. Mother's Authoritarianism	-.287***	-.384****	-.204*	-.395****	1.000				
6. Mother's Authoritativeness	.434****	.695****	.309***	.100	-.432****	1.000			
7. Father's Permissiveness	.024	-.106	.087	.639****	-.167*	-.086	1.000		
8. Father's Authoritarianism	-.158*	-.094	-.450****	-.211**	.432****	-.161*	-.161*	1.000	
9. Father's Authoritativeness	.415****	.237**	.690****	-.010	-.147	.402****	.110	-.503****	1.000

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .005
****p < .0005

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self-esteem was found to correlate with mother's nurturance (r = +.587, p < .0005), father's nurturance (r = +.560, p < .0005), mother's authoritarianism (r = -.287, p < .005), mother's authoritativeness (r = +.434, p < .0005), father's authoritarianism (r = -.158, p < .05), and father's authoritativeness (r = +.415, p < .0005). Also similar to the total data results, regression analyses of the female participants' responses revealed that: a) 34% of the variance in self-esteem is associated with mother's nurturance, b) this adjusted R^2 value was significantly affected by the addition of the father's nurturance variable [F (1,164) = 32.09, p < .0001] —— together mother's nurturance and father's nurturance were associated with nearly 45% of the variance in the young women's self-esteem, and c) R^2 was not increased by the addition of any of the parental discipline variables.

The intercorrelations for the male participants are presented in Table 3. Once again, self-esteem was found to be significantly related to mother's nur-

Table 3

Intercorrelations for Male Participants

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Self-Esteem	1.000								
2.	Mother's Nurturance	.414****	1.000							
3.	Father's Nurturance	.312****	.316****	1.000						
4.	Mother's Permissiveness	-.036	.016	-.136	1.000					
5.	Mother's Authoritarianism	-.160*	-.280***	-.045	.443****	1.000				
6.	Mother's Authoritativeness	.202**	.472****	.255***	-.015	-.305***	1.000			
7.	Father's Permissiveness	.016	-.132	.080	.525****	-.251***	-.109	1.000		
8.	Father's Authoritarianism	-.218**	-.152	-.356****	-.286***	.585****	-.169*	-.547****	1.000	
9.	Father's Authoritativeness	.216**	.231**	.622****	-.115	-.058	.425****	-.006	-.393****	1.000

* p < .05
** p < .025
*** p < .005
**** p < .0005

turance (r = +.414, p < .0005), father's nurturance (r = +.512, p < .0005), mother's authoritarianism (r = -.160, p < .05), mother's authoritativeness (r = +.202, p < .025), father's authoritarianism (r = -.218, p < .025), and father's authoritativeness (r = +.216, p < .025). Once again, the variables of mother's nurturance and father's nurturance together resulted in the best regression equation for predicting self-esteem, yielding an adjusted R^2 value of .284. And once again, the addition of the parental discipline variables to the regression equations failed to significantly augment the predictive ability yielded by the parental nurturance variables alone.

Discussion

It was not too surprising to find that parental nurturance and self-esteem correlated significantly. Although other researchers (e.g., Bachman, 1982; Coopersmith, 1967; Sears, 1970) had not used college-aged participants, they had obtained similar results. What was surprising, however, was the strength of this relationship. For all the participants in the present study, 37% of the variance in self-esteem was associated with parental nurturance; and for the female participants, this R^2 value was nearly 45%!

Admittedly, the results of the present study are correlational, and undoubtedly children do influence parental responses to them, but the fact that our results strongly support the findings of previous researchers who studied younger age groups suggests that causality in the present study is in the direction of parental nurturance affecting self-esteem. Thus the findings of the present study further substantiate the suggestion that acceptance, approval, and support on the part of the parents is significant in the development of self-esteem in children. The fact that the "children" in the present study were actually well into adolescence (their average age was approximately

19 years old and nearly 2/3 of them were no longer living with their parents) suggests that this influence persists well beyond childhood.

Factors that we had anticipated would especially effect self-esteem were the authoritarian and authoritative parental prototypes. Although correlation coefficients did reveal the hypothesized relationships between these forms of discipline and self-esteem, the regression analyses suggested that these disciplinary styles may have their effect on self-esteem primarily because of their relationship to parental nurturance. Authoritative parenting seems to convey to the child the impression that he/she is accepted, affirmed, and respected. Authoritarian parenting, however, with its emphasis upon obedience, forceful punishment, and the establishment of hard and fast rules in the family, tends to undermine in the child feelings of acceptance and support by the parents. Therefore, what have consistently been treated as separate parenting variables (i.e., parental nurturance and parental discipline) may actually be closely linked together, with the type of discipline exercised in the home being instrumental in the development of a child's sense of being accepted, supported, respected, and nurtured by his/her parents.

One final point concerning the obtained correlations between parental nurturance and self-esteem is especially noteworthy. The fact that 28% of the variance in self-esteem for males is associated with the parental nurturance variables, whereas 45% of the variance in women's self-esteem is associated with these variables, suggests that something different may be going on in the development of self-esteem for females than for males. It appears that the development of self-esteem in females may be more dependent upon parental acceptance and approval than is the development of self-esteem in males. While these suggestions are somewhat speculative at this point, they do point out a research perspective in the area of self-esteem that is in need of further investigation.

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